

“Ten Things Patients Should Know” Series

BE PREPARED FOR YOUR SURGERY

1. **DECIDING ON SURGERY:** Why is the surgery needed? How successful is the surgery in correcting the problem and what are the potential short and long term risks? What will the recovery process be like?
2. **CHOOSING A SURGEON:** Ask about the surgeon’s experience with this particular surgery and check his or her credentials online. Is the surgeon board-certified in the specialty you require?
3. **WHERE TO HAVE YOUR SURGERY:** Check your hospital online at www.QualityCheck.org or www.HospitalCompare.hhs.gov. Does the hospital have an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and a Rapid Response Team (RRT) to respond to emergencies?
4. **SCHEDULING YOUR SURGERY:** If possible, schedule your surgery for early in the day and early in the week. Try to avoid having procedures on major holidays, nights or weekends.
5. **SURGERY AND RECOVERY:** Who will actually perform the surgery? Will assistants or residents be participating, and if so, to what degree? Will the surgeon be in town and available in the days after surgery?
6. **ANESTHESIA:** Will your anesthesia be handled by a board-certified anesthesiologist or a certified nurse anesthetist? Who will be assisting them?
7. **PREPARING FOR SURGERY:** Patients should not shave surgical site for 2-3 days before surgery to prevent small cuts in skin where bacteria can enter. Patients must not eat or drink for 6 to 8 hours before surgery.
8. **THE DAY OF SURGERY:** Be sure all information on the patient’s ID band is accurate. Have all pre-operative medications, including antibiotics, been ordered and given? Be sure the surgeon signs the surgical site before the patient is sedated.
9. **ONCE SURGERY IS OVER:** Have an advocate present to discuss details and ask if there were any complications with the surgeon after the surgery is over. Be sure the patient is kept warm and ask if the patient needs specific treatments to prevent blood clots.
10. **PAIN CONTROL:** If the patient is using a PCA (patient controlled analgesia) pump, be aware that malfunctions can occur and watch for signs of an overdose, including shallow breathing, extreme sleepiness and small pupils. Be aware that pain medications can cause severe constipation so ask about precautions.